

THE AFRICAN SEED TRADE ASSOCIATION

Position statement on Modern Biotechnology

(Adopted by AFSTA GA on 29th March 2002 in Dakar - Senegal)

The African Seed Trade Association (AFSTA) recognises the importance of Modern Biotechnology as an efficient tool in enhancing food production and agricultural development in Africa, in combination with other existing and new technologies. Agriculture will remain a key area in socio-economic upliftment in view of its average contribution of 70% to national economies.

Modern biotechnology has made possible significant crop improvements such as pest and disease-resistant varieties and improved quality food and a number of new varieties widely grown in both developed and developing countries have been bred. Africa loses an estimated 40% of its grain crops due to pest, disease and weed damage in the field and post-harvest losses. It clearly stands to benefit from adoption of new unique traits, which have already proved their worth in 52 million ha globally.

By means of Modern Biotechnology, Africa will be able to develop superior varieties that can perform well under the severe biotic and abiotic stresses that are extremely detrimental to the African agriculture and at the same time produce better quality food and feed. Indeed, the African continent has real need to increase food production efficiency per hectare for its fast growing population, thereby also contributing to reducing deforestation and environmental degradation.

Therefore,

- AFSTA encourages and supports research and applications of agricultural biotechnology to improve agricultural productivity.

- AFSTA urges all African stakeholders, both public and private, to actively participate in worldwide debates on the safe use of agricultural biotechnology.

- AFSTA affirms that appropriate policies and programs must be developed to foster rapid developments in agricultural biotechnology in order to ensure a safe and sufficient supply of food, which will ultimately raise African farmers' standard of living.

- AFSTA recommends that adequate regulations and proper scientific protocols must be established as a priority to assess on scientific basis and allowing for African level and

existing conditions, possible health and other environmental risks to ensure Safe Modern Biotechnology in Africa. However AFSTA considers that there are no specific risks inherent to modern biotechnology and that the safety assessment has to be made on a product-by-product basis. A prerequisite is to enact biosafety regulatory systems required under the Cartagena Biosafety Protocol in such a manner that these systems are practical, enforceable and affordable.

- Considering the economic situation in Africa in general and the level of materials and equipments required to properly conduct modern biotechnology, African countries need help to build capacity for developing and assessing the safety of new transgenic crops. AFSTA appeals to both Multilateral Development Organisations and Foreign Aid Donors to assist in strengthening African countries in several aspects such as education of the stakeholders regarding opportunities, as well as the possible associated risks, suitable regulatory protocols, promotion of entrepreneurship and local private sector participation, research infrastructure, special programme for tropical plants, etc. It is especially urgent to build capacity within national regulatory authorities so as to ensure adequate regulatory oversight.
- AFSTA is willing to cooperate with international organisations dealing with agricultural biotechnology and participate in any debates by providing the practical expertise of its members on the subject.